

Working Notes

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
SENIOR AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF MARCH 17, 2014**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas called the March 17, 2014 Senior Affairs Committee meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. in the Council Chambers, Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Councilor Joe Kochanek and Councilor Frank Szeps, Denise Sanderson (Elderly Services Coordinator/Municipal Agent) and Cathy Sylvester (Senior Coordinator/Recreation Supervisor). Also present were; Melissa Gerace-Hicks (Human Services Director) and Various Seniors of R.H. (Rich Laria, Barbara Josephs, Marlene O'Leary, Melodie Perretto and Marilyn Swepson).

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said the February 18, 2014 meeting of this Committee had been snowed out so the agenda was just being carried forward to today. She asked if there was anyone from the public who had anything to say. There was no one from the public who had anything to say.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND WORKING NOTES – JANUARY'S MEETING

Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to approve the Minutes and Working Notes of the January 27, 2014 meeting of the Senior Affairs Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

4. DISCUSSION ON GRANT INFORMATION

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said at this Committee's meeting in January that they had a really good discussion on programs. Denise Sanderson and Cathy Sylvester had reported on information with regards to surrounding Towns. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they had also been talking about possible locations for a facility, etc. They had asked Denise Sanderson and Cathy Sylvester to get some type of information on grants that would possibly help fund some kind of a facility. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas turned to Denise Sanderson and Cathy Sylvester at this point.

Cathy Sylvester said she and Denise Sanderson had contacted different places, etc. They had contacted State Senator Paul Doyle, State Representative Tony Guerrera and they also had contacted the Hartford Foundation to see if there is different funding. Cathy Sylvester said that she and Denise Sanderson had also contacted some other Towns that had gotten some funding.

Cathy Sylvester said there is money. She said she was advised to ask State Representative Tony Guerrero if he could possibly get funding for them in order for them to get a site plan, an engineer and an architect onboard. They would have to have a formal letter from the Town Council before any of those people will tell them what they will give them, etc. Those people have to know that this Town is serious about this. Cathy Sylvester said money is out there and it is just a question of when a formal letter can be sent. She said this will make sense if they can have funding for the site plan, engineer and architect outside of it being tax dollars.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Cathy Sylvester if they would be going back to State Representative Tony Guerrero to see if they could get this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said things are kind of tight right now because they are going to be going through the budget soon. Cathy Sylvester said she and Denise Sanderson are looking for money so that this won't have to be incurred by the taxpayers or as little as possible if it does have to be. Denise Sanderson said State Representative Tony Guerrero wants the Town Council to write a letter stating that they are serious about looking into a new site or expanding the site and then the grant money for the site plan and architect, etc. will be covered.

Councilor Joe Kochanek confirmed about them getting a consensus of the Town Council with regards to them looking into this and then he asked who the formal letter would be addressed to. Cathy Sylvester said she would go back to ask for more information. Councilor Joe Kochanek confirmed that this would be funding for the site plan and the architect, etc. Cathy Sylvester said this would be for the site plan, an engineer and an architect. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this would be for all of the initial work that they would need. Cathy Sylvester said right and this would be for whatever that would cost. She referred to how Councilor Frank Szeps had mentioned the Kennedy House. Cathy Sylvester was told that it was Councilor Joe Kochanek who had mentioned that. Cathy Sylvester apologized to Councilor Joe Kochanek. Cathy Sylvester said as a taxpayer that she thinks this is a great idea because that is property that the Town has. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas referred to another area that Councilor Joe Kochanek had mentioned at this Committee's last meeting and she said that if they want to keep this facility in this campus area that they could explore adding onto the back of the Cora J. Belden Library. A connection could also be put between the Cora J. Belden Library and the Town Hall. This would be in case there is inclement weather. She gave more details about this. She asked the Councilors if they thought a motion should be made and she asked if this should be added onto the next agenda for the Town Council.

Councilor Frank Szeps said this is definitely something to explore. Councilor Joe Kochanek thought that they should at least put a recommendation out to the Town Council so they know there is a need for additional space for the seniors and that they have an opportunity to get some of this work done through grants. This doesn't mean that they have to act on it this year but he said at least this will get "the wheels moving".

Councilor Joe Kochanek made a motion to let the Town Council know that the Senior Affairs Committee is serious about looking into additional facilities for the seniors. This would take a letter addressed to whomever about this intent being shared by the Town Council. The motion was seconded by Councilor Frank Szeps and adopted unanimously.

Before this motion was voted on, Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Councilor Frank Szeps if he had any comments. Councilor Frank Szeps said he thinks that this is a good start. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they will ask Mayor Henry Vassel to put this item on the agenda for the Town Council meeting that will be held in two weeks so that they can discuss this then. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said if they can get a letter in the meantime then they can have it at the Council table as part of their package for the Town Council meeting in two weeks. She asked Cathy Sylvester or Denise Sanderson if they could get back to her with regards to whom the letter should be addressed to. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this could ‘get the ball rolling’ for people to look at this. She referred again to the Kennedy House, as well as adding onto the Cora J. Belden Library and she said that she thinks those are a couple of areas that they should explore.

At this point the motion was voted on.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told Denise Sanderson and Cathy Sylvester that they could add this to their list.

5. SENIOR SURVEY

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said when this Committee had met originally that they had talked about a senior survey and she didn’t want to lose sight of this. She thought that Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson had given them enough information. They need to explore expansion with regards to services being offered. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she still thinks that they need to have some type of a survey out to the seniors to see if the services that are being offered meet the needs of the people. She wants to make sure that there aren’t seniors out there who are struggling and who they aren’t getting a hold of for some reason because there are programs for them. She mentioned that she has talked to Denise Sanderson, Cathy Sylvester and the Tax Assessor to get this information. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas thinks it is really important that they make sure that the people who need the help get it but she doesn’t know if they will even fill out a survey. She mentioned if they can get surveys out at least and she thinks it would be helpful if they can go with the age of 55 and older. She thinks it would be helpful if they can plan ahead as much as they can. She said that she needs some help or direction. She asked if somebody has some type of a survey that they could start with that has some general questions. She said that maybe this is something that could be provided to the Councilors so that they could look at these and tweak these a little bit.

Councilor Joe Kochanek suggested that this survey begins with people who are the age of 55. He said whoever is filling out the survey should let them know what age they are and that people should remain anonymous. He is sure that other Towns have done surveys like this so that they can try to get a feeling for what is needed out there for senior services. He told Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson that he thinks it would be helpful for them to put a plan together for everybody if all of this information is gathered from the other Towns and brought to them.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she isn’t sure what the most cost effective way would be to have this done. Denise Sanderson said she thought that Lisa Zerio (Director of Parks and Recreation & Custodial Staff) had mentioned that this could be put in one of their brochures but she said that

she could be mistaken. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said Lisa Zerio had said something about the brochure so they would probably be looking at the fall one because the spring one had just come out. Denise Sanderson said there is one in the summer too. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said if they could make the deadline for the summer one then that would be great. She mentioned about these surveys being online also or in local Doctors' offices, etc. She said that she reads the brochures but maybe a lot of people don't. She said that these surveys could be put in places where people will actually fill them out. She asked if anyone else had any suggestions. The Cora J. Belden Library and the Community Center were mentioned. Melodie Perretto mentioned large apartment complexes and having these left in their offices. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas then mentioned the 55 years and older communities. She knows that they can't solicit but she referred to if there is someone who is in charge of these communities. She doesn't know if anyone has any connections with these communities in Town. She said if someone could be talked to with regards to telling them that they are trying to help people out in that age group and if something could be left that could be given to the residents. She wants to make a concerted effort that they reach out to everyone who is 55 years old and older so that they can get a good response. She will feel better about them giving these people a chance to speak and she referred to what Councilor Joe Kochanek had said about this being anonymous. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said a phone number could be listed probably in case someone has issues and wants to talk to the Human Services Department.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Councilor Frank Szeps if he had any comments. Councilor Frank Szeps said by the time that they get this program "rolling" that he is interested in bumping this age to 53 years old. He mentioned if they poll the 53 and 54 year olds that they will be 55 years old and eligible by the time this program is up and running so their input is also needed. Cathy Sylvester said she and Denise Sanderson can go to surrounding Community Centers like they had done when they were looking for the information on the sizes to ask if they have done surveys of this kind. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson that whatever Towns that they got the programs from that they could ask them if they have done any kinds of surveys. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said it would be interesting to see what their questions are and if this fits in with their thought process or she said that maybe they thought of things that didn't even occur to them. She said maybe there could be a question or two in this about a Community Center because they are pursuing that so there won't be questions just about services or programs. There could be questions about how often seniors use the Community Center now, etc.

Rich Laria said he has a little experience with surveys. He said the first thing they need to do is determine what their goal is, what their objective is and what it is that they want to accomplish with the survey. They can then determine the layout and the kind of questions they may want to ask once they determine this. He said this will be a "mammoth undertaking" if they try to reach everyone. It will be very difficult to do something like this. They are looking to get a representative sample within a survey normally. They will want to get enough individuals that they will need to extrapolate the data so that they can come to some type of a conclusion with that. He said this could be one hundred, two hundred or three hundred people and he said that he doesn't know.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said she would like to reach more than the people who are coming to the Community Center right now because there are reasons why those people don't come to it. She thinks this survey will have to be sent to a really large group if they want to end up with one hundred people because she knows when a survey had gone out with regards to the brochures that only a small number had responded even though Lisa Zerio had sent this out to a lot of people. She told Rich Laria that she understands what he is saying but she would hate to just "tunnel just a few people" because they won't get all of those people to respond. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas is looking for as many people as possible who can turn this in. Rich Laria thinks their biggest challenge more than anything else will be them getting the returns. Councilor Joe Kochanek said the other Towns must have found a way of doing this. He mentioned about a letter with questions being sent to someone and how they then have to mail this back. He mentioned the cost of postage and how envelopes will have to be provided, etc. He then mentioned about this being online. He said about there being some way of notifying that they are all looking for a way to provide a better service. He referred to how Councilor Frank Szeps had mentioned the 53 year olds. Councilor Joe Kochanek said they are going to get a group of people who really aren't participating presently in the Community Center activities but they will be in two or three years. He thinks the better off they will be, the more they get. Rich Laria said they have to "cast a wide net". Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said there is a difference between space, services and programs. She said some people may really hit on something with regards to a service that they would really use. She mentioned how she had an elderly aunt who would receive something and read it. She said that her elderly aunt would then call her and she would have to deliver that piece of paper right then because her elderly aunt wanted to make sure that her opinion got known. She told everyone that they might hit an audience where there is something that these people want to do. She thinks this is something that they need to try at least because she doesn't think that they have touched the senior population in total as far as them finding out what their thoughts are about what is going on in Rocky Hill with regards to programs, services and space. She mentioned about if the seniors are getting enough where they are able to pay their tax bill because this is a concern. She knows that a lot of younger families have this issue but she is assuming that a lot of older families have it too. She said from talking to the Tax Assessor that she knows there is a reverse mortgage that is available to seniors. A lot of seniors don't want to do this though because they don't want to leave their children with debt when they pass away. She said that she would like to find out about these issues.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked if there was anything else. Councilor Frank Szeps asked Cathy Sylvester if she could point him in the right direction or if she could at least send him or the Committee something so they can get a better understanding of what the government mandates are exactly for a Town to provide senior services. Councilor Frank Szeps said this will help him to develop some questions for the survey. He asked if this could be sent to their Town e-mail addresses in the form of a PDF because they have an app where they could download this, etc.

6. OTHER

Councilor Joe Kochanek told everyone that they had a discussion awhile back about what he would consider to be a Capital Improvement that they were looking for. He asked Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson if they put anything in the budget this year for Capital Improvements. Denise Sanderson said they did. She said that Lisa Zerio told her to do this for

five years, ten years and fifteen years. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked what the Capital Improvements would be for five years. Denise Sanderson said this would be chairs and tables. She also mentioned improvements in the kitchen and then she said a new stove, as well as a convection oven. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked if the stove and convection oven are one unit. Denise Sanderson said these would be two different ones. Councilor Joe Kochanek asked Denise Sanderson if she had a cost on this and she said that she didn't. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas confirmed that this would be on year five of the five year plan. Denise Sanderson said yes. Councilor Joe Kochanek confirmed that there was no cost that was associated with this in the five year plan and he asked if it would be possible to come up with a cost for that particular unit for the five year plan. Denise Sanderson said sure. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson if this information could be shared with them at the time when they will be coming in front of the Town Council for their budget with Lisa Zerio. Cathy Sylvester and Denise Sanderson said yes.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked if there was anything else for the good of the cause. Melodie Perretto said from what she understands that the Town Council has not actually heard about what they want money wise. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said this is correct. Melodie Perretto confirmed that this will be part of the Councilors' packages when the Town Council meets and she asked about if someone wants to come to say something about this when that meeting is open to the public. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked Melodie Perretto what she was referring to when she said "money wise". Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said nothing from this Committee has been brought forward to the Town Council because they haven't solidified anything. She said seeing that they are a new Subcommittee that they have just been gathering information at their last few meetings. She said they actually made a motion today to go to the Town Council to discuss this. Melodie Perretto asked if the discussion about what the seniors want for a new Senior Community Center hasn't been discussed with the whole Town Council and that only the three of them (Councilors) on this Committee know about this. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said that is right. Councilor Joe Kochanek said this is the way the process is. This Committee will move things up to the Town Council. They can recommend things or not recommend them. He said they will be recommending this. Melodie Perretto said she thought this is the way it is but she wanted to make sure. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said tonight is the first night that they had item with regards to grants on the agenda and according to Cathy Sylvester, they need to get some go ahead from the Town Council for them to explore the grants. They will need to bring this to the Town Council for them to have this exploration. They are ready to go to the Town Council to say that they can get grants to do this. Melodie Perretto asked if there will be a full package when they go to the full Town Council. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas said they are going to be looking for the Town Council to give the okay for them to proceed with this. Melodie Perretto said thank you. Chairwoman Cathy Vargas told Melodie Perretto that she was welcome.

Chairwoman Cathy Vargas asked if there was anything else. There was nothing else. She thanked everybody.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Frank Szeps made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:26 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor Joe Kochanek and adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo-Anne Booth
Recording Secretary